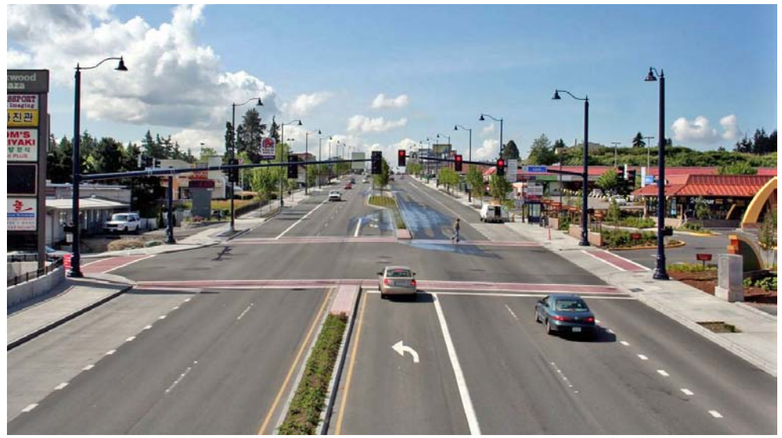
Next Steps

WSDOT's State Highways as Mainstreets Research will be highlighted by FHWA in the upcoming webinar and FHWA's report, "Livability in Transportation Guidebook" to be released this summer.

WSDOT will moderate a panel discussion on mainstreet highways at the upcoming Washington chapter meeting of the American Planning Association in October in Richland.



SR 99 in Shoreline at 152nd

Report Title and WA-RD Number

State Highways as Main Streets: A Study of Community Design and Visioning
WA-RD 733.1
www.wsdot.wa.gov/Research/Reports/700/733.1.htm

Contact

Kathleen B. Davis
Director
Highways and Local Programs Division
360-705-7871
DavisK@wsdot.wa.gov

Paula Reeves
Community Design Assistance Manager
Highways and Local Programs Division
360.705.7258
ReevesP@wsdot.wa.gov

Washington State Department of Transportation

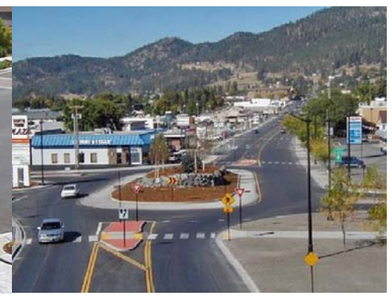
State Highways as Main Streets Program Proposal

Washington State Department of Transportation

Summer 2010

Aberdeen

Bingen



Colville

Background

In cities and counties across Washington, sections of state highways range from those that focus on moving people and goods through a region to those intended to provide access to local destinations. Between these two extremes, are sections of state highways that run through cities and must serve as both thoroughfares and main streets. The "main street highways" provide local access for a community while serving regional mobility needs. These highways serve to maintain traffic flow, while ensuring community livability and safety.

Competing needs of main street highways

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) recognizes the competing needs for these main street highways and commissioned a study to:

- explore community transportation design policy to improve collaboration when state highways serve as local main streets
- determine successful approaches to meet federal requirements for visioning
- find ways to assist local agencies in improving their grant applications to WSDOT
- identify new ways to translate context sensitive design guidance into practice
- encourage collaboration between architecture, planning, and transportation engineering professions

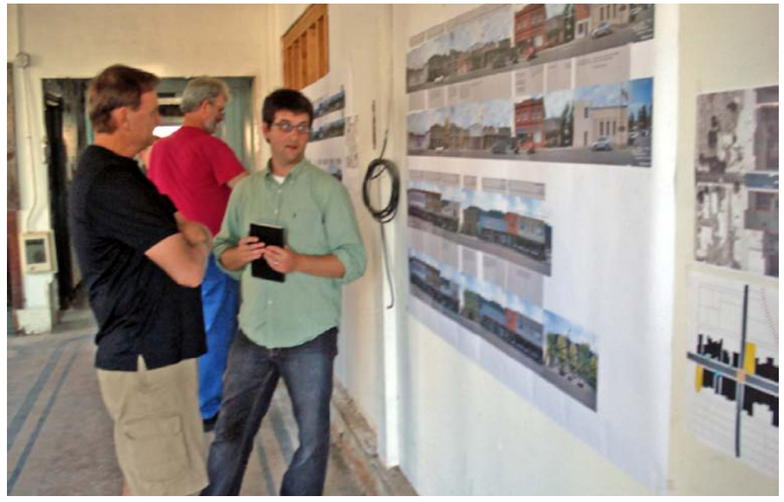
In this study, student researchers participating in University of Washington's Storefront Studio Program explored a number of community design methods. The students reviewed recent case studies from Washington and other states, and based on findings, developed a recommended framework for community transportation design for main street highways.

Through archival research, photographic documentation, and digital collages, the students generated before-and-after streetscapes and individual design proposals. Business owners, property owners, and residents provided feedback to the students through various visioning exercises, helping the students develop better designs for revitalizing main street highways in the Washington towns of Morton, Roslyn, Goldendale, and Sekiu.

WSDOT explored ways to engage the community

A primary objective of this pilot project was to determine if and how community based design and visioning could be used to improve transportation project delivery. Low-cost community design and visioning techniques were applied in four pilot cities as part of this project. In these four communities, the street level storefront open house formats were an effective forum for exchange and community engagement. The illustrated transportation strategies are potent catalysts for community dialogue.

Although a community must have local internal direction, the outside technical assistance provided an invaluable tool for research, visualization, communication, and detailed design development. By using the community design exercises to develop concept visions, each of the four communities were able to achieve action plans that were ready to implement. By embedding technical engineering, planning, and architecture support in the local community, and pairing that assistance with community engagement in the process; the project succeeded in facilitating community based design. This process has significant implications for improving transportation project delivery in Washington and elsewhere.



Storefront studio – students talking with community in Morton, Washington

Greater community involvement helps keep projects on track

For WSDOT projects constructed on main street highways, we found that applying a greater degree of community-design considerations during project development can help avoid costly changes to the project's scope and schedule, and improve project delivery times.

Through this study, we also identified more than 500 miles of Washington's state highways that serve as main streets for cities of all sizes. Since these "main street highways" must provide both access to local destinations and serve wider regional mobility needs, they face twice the pressure to maintain traffic flow and ensure community livability and safety. These locations also see some of the highest rates of pedestrian involved traffic collisions. Main street highways are important to Washington's communities in many ways, and as this study demonstrates, main street highways require additional investment in community design to help ensure improved safety, mobility, and efficient project delivery.

Research indicates need for criteria

Based on the findings of the study, WSDOT determined the need to identify a subset of state highways that operate as community main streets; similar to what was developed for this study to help transportation agencies anticipate scope and schedule adjustments and resulting project cost adjustments.

WSDOT design standards, project development, and delivery policies are being re-evaluated for main street highways. Additional resources and technical assistance for community design on main street highways is needed, especially for projects in smaller communities with limited or no planning staff.

Implementation of the findings

While many states have developed design standards for main streets and urban thoroughfares, this project is the first to systematically identify a subset of state highways that operate as community main streets.

This project contributes a new approach to the national discussion on context sensitive solutions. Through the identification of specific sections of main street highways, the project provides a defensible method for applying a complete streets design approach at a statewide level.

This pilot project also breaks new ground in land use and transportation integration by establishing a model community design process, bringing together architects, planners, and engineers to broaden the state transportation project development process.

For the pilot communities, there have been immediate results ranging from façade improvements to trail connections to community designed welcome centers served by transit.

Developing a program

This research and pilot project has lead WSDOT to begin developing a technical assistance program that will help communities create more complete, compact, and connected mixed-use districts along these sections of main street highways.

WSDOT has solicited feedback on a draft program proposal from divisions within the agency and external partners including: Association of Washington Cities, Department of Commerce, Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Transportation Choices Coalition, Feet First, Bicycle Alliance of Washington, American Planning Association, Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition, and others.

General feedback has been, "This program has tremendous potential for helping local governments comply not only with Greenhouse Gases and Vehicle Miles Traveled reduction targets, but actually implement their Growth Management Act plans by linking land use and transportation at a sub-area plan level."

Current Conditions: State Route 508, Morton, Washington

Community Vision: State Route 508, Morton, Washington